

**Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
December 9, 2003
Plymouth**

Notes

Next meeting: February 18, 2003. Plymouth, WI

Present: Tom Hansen, Paul Peeters, Justine Hasz, Steve Hogler, Al Niebur, Sue Marcquenski, Brad Eggold, Randy Link, Pradeep Hirethota, Matt Coffaro, Al Kaas, Bill Horns

1. Brief updates

Time was allowed for short updates and reminders of topics of interest. The following were mentioned.

- WF/GLSFC meetings of Sept 27 and future Dec 6
- Mass-marking task group formed by Council of Lake Committee
 - Some thoughts/questions/concerns were raised related to marking all steelhead or chinook in Lake Michigan coded-wire tags and/or adipose clips: 1) There is substantial cost to reading cwt's. 2) The mass marking technology proposed (Northwest Marine Technology) may amplify the incidence of BKD in a lot of fish. 3) Is there a risk of importing west coast diseases with the NWT equipment? 4) If fish were marked with blank cwt's, stocked fish could fairly easily be detected. 5) Mass marking with adipose clip only would destroy the accepted convention of using that clip to flag cwt's.
- Status of rule/advisory proposals for spring hearings
 - Bill Horns agreed to contact Jay Wesley (acting Lake Michigan Committee designee for Michigan) to try and get some central office feedback on the proposed walleye rule changes for the M&M area of Green Bay.
- LMC and LMTC activities (April 2005 lake-wide stocking meeting, March 2005 "State of the Lake" conference, January 2004 LMTC meeting, LMYP TG recommendation regarding LM yellow perch rules)
- GLFC Fishery Research Program call for proposals
- Final LMFT recommendation regarding Lake Michigan fisheries staffing
- Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum (new members, travel funding, review of last meeting)
 - It was suggested that an in depth discussion of the LMFF would be appropriate for a later meeting.
- Cormorants (meeting scheduled for January in Minneapolis, letter from LMFF)
- LMFT involvement in statewide species teams
 - Bill Horns agreed to send a memo to the team leaders requesting that the LMFT be consulted when appropriate as rules and other management strategies are developed.
- Recommendation of Yellow Perch Task Group regarding harvest regulations for Lake Michigan
- Unlicensed charter captains busted
 - Bill Horns agreed to draft a memo of appreciation to Ryan Vollenberg and Steve Day for their work on these cases.
- Disposition of expected surplus coho fry in January
 - Al Kaas will re-draft an earlier memo and share with the LMFT. A decision will be needed in mid to late January.

2. Green Bay yellow perch rule proposal

Background (from agenda). Hearings will be held on December 11 in Peshtigo and Green Bay regarding our rule proposal to extend current regulations for two years. Justine has met with John

Netto of FWS to discuss the new statistical catch at age model for Green Bay yellow perch. She will prepare a data presentation for the public hearings in time for a trial run and discussion with the LMFT.

Action. No action, this was a discussion item.

3. Possible study to quantify cormorant consumption of yellow perch in 2004

Background (from agenda). The case that cormorants can and sometimes do affect game fish abundance is growing, but we still cannot say that they are affecting yellow perch in Green Bay. With an abundant 2003 yoy year class in Green Bay, with an updated Green Bay yellow perch SCAA model in place, and with some available funds (the remaining NRDA funds dedicated to Green Bay yellow perch restoration), we have an opportunity to gain some key information. One tactic would be to use the NRDA funds to fund an external study to estimate the consumption (numbers, size and age distributions) of yellow perch eaten by cormorants in Green Bay during 2004. These data, in combination with the updated model may support the hypothesis that cormorants are a problem for yellow perch here, or may allow us to reject that hypothesis. The Green Bay Fisheries Research Group could be asked to facilitate the development of a study.

Action. The LMFT endorsed the proposed study, with the provision that it cover more than one year. Justine Hasz will call a meeting of the GBFRG to discuss this research idea, along with other topics.

4. Feral broodstock management

Background (from agenda). We have some new information related to digest related to feral broodstock management: 1) Paul and Ken have completed the 2002 BAFF and Strawberry Creek report. 2) Sue has completed fall 2003 fish health inspections. 3) Steve Hogler has completed the 2003 steelhead report. 4) Amber Peters et al. have released a new report about chinook energy dynamics

Action. No action, this was a discussion item.

5. Membership on LSTG Steering Committee

Background (from agenda). The Lake Sturgeon Task Group was formed by the Lake Michigan Committee to develop a lakewide sturgeon management plan for Lake Michigan. A five-member steering committee was set up to lead the LSTG, with Ron Bruch as the Wisconsin representative. Ron has decided to step down, so we need to designate a replacement.

Action. Brad Eggold was designated to replace Ron Bruch on the steering committee.

6. Sturgeon policy

Background (from agenda). Now that we have called off our 2003 sturgeon restoration plans for the Milwaukee and Manitowoc Rivers, we need to make plans for the future. Our people will work with the Lake Sturgeon Task Group to develop a lakewide lake sturgeon restoration plan, and if all goes well we will proceed in 2004 or 2005 with a stocking program that conforms to that plan. In the event that the Lake Michigan Committee cannot reach consensus on a plan that allows us to move forward, we may want to consider other options. This raises questions about how to proceed in the event that one or more members of the LMC objects to any stocking or asks us to postpone stocking until a lake-wide plan has been completed. One approach would be the following:

- Continue to work with the LSTG to develop a lake-wide plan that the LMC will endorse and that allows us to move forward with a stocking program. It is conceivable that this will move quickly and we will be able to launch a non-controversial stocking program starting with egg collections in April.
- Inform the other Lake Michigan agencies in January that we would be willing to postpone stocking until a lake-wide plan is concluded if all Lake Michigan agencies agree to do the same for all sturgeon stocking in the upper lakes (Superior, Michigan, and Huron).
- If commitments to postpone stocking are not made by the other jurisdictions before April, prepare a white paper describing our specific propagation and stocking plans and explaining why the benefits of initiating the program outweigh the risks, and move ahead with plans to propagate and stock sturgeon in 2004.

This approach would demonstrate a healthy respect for the opinions of other agencies, and would be consistent with the letter and spirit of the Joint Strategic Plan. It would allow us to be reasonably aggressive in pursuing our objectives while still supporting the Consensus Strategy of the Joint Strategic Plan. However, this approach may result in the delay of stocking until 2005, or later.

Action. The LMFT endorsed the general approach, but there were questions about how to state the second bullet. The point is to say that we will forego stocking if other agencies will forego similar stocking efforts. Bill Horns will draft new specific language for consideration by the Policy Committee prior to the next LMFT meeting.

7. LMFT communication/decision making

Background. Steve Hogler has raised concerns regarding communication among the LMFT, the LMFT Policy Committee, and the FH Bureau. He suggests that (1) notes from policy team meetings—including who votes for what be taken and circulated to the core LMFT, (2) recommendations to team sponsors or Fisheries Bureau Policy staff be made in writing and circulated to the LMFT and (3) if Bureau Staff (Staggs and/or Hewett) reverses our recommendation (as was the case for sturgeon or in the sunset length for perch) they provide us with the reasons why our recommendation was reversed.

Action. There was no disagreement with Steve's suggestions. It was noted that the LMFT can only request information from Mike and Steve, but Bill Horns should be able to summarize and reasons for changes to LMFT recommendations.